

VZCZCXRO8658

PP RUEHAG RUEHROV RUEHSL RUEHSR

DE RUEHCV #0983 2092216

ZNY CCCCC ZZH

P 282216Z JUL 09

FM AMEMBASSY CARACAS

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3465

INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUEHWH/WESTERN HEMISPHERIC AFFAIRS DIPL POSTS PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM MIAMI FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L CARACAS 000983

SIPDIS

HQSOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD

DEPARTMENT PASS TO AID/OTI (RPORTER)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/20/2019

TAGS: PREL PTER CO VE

SUBJECT: ANNOUNCEMENT OF COLOMBIAN FOLS PROMPTS CHAVEZ TO
DECLARE THE UNITED STATES AS "THE ENEMY"

REF: A. 2008 CARACAS 986

1B. 2007 CARACAS 2231

1C. 2008 CARACAS 283

1D. CARACAS 851

Classified By: ACTING POLITICAL COUNSELOR DARNALL STEUART,
FOR REASON 1.4 (B) & (D)

11. (SBU) Summary: Following the announcement of U. S. Forward Operating Locations in Colombia, President Hugo Chavez openly labeled the United States as "the enemy" in a July 23 speech to military officers. In an attempt to intimidate Colombia, Chavez on July 20, ordered a "review" of relations with Colombia -- the third in two years. GBRV officials and supporters have continually criticized the FOLs since then. Chavez increasingly sees Colombia as a proxy of the "American Empire" to thwart his Bolivarian revolution. Under these circumstances, his reactions to events could become more dramatic or even reckless. End Summary

12. (SBU) Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez, during a July 20 televised broadcast, called the bases a threat and added, "You have opened your door to those who constantly attack us." Chavez added that the State Department and SOUTHCOM have a history of overthrowing governments and support the coup in Honduras. Chavez then ordered a top to bottom "review" of relations with Colombia in light of the assumed opening of three U.S. Forward Operating Locations (FOLs). Speaking three days later to officers graduating from the command and general staff college, Chavez turned up his rhetoric, telling Colombia, "You've opened your house to an enemy of your neighbor." Chavez also predicted the FOLs would bring "mercenaries, spy planes, the CIA and paramilitaries."

13. (SBU) Following a meeting with the Colombian Ambassador, Foreign Minister Nicolas Maduro called the Colombian plan, "a slap in the face," and said that the decision could break the rules of the region. Maduro added that Russia, China and Cuba do not have plans to invade Colombia or conquer territories in the region, "but that isn't the case with the United States and its history of armed intervention." Appearing on a government-run talk show, Francisco Arias Cardenas, Vice Minister for Latin America and the Caribbean declared, "bases on Venezuela's border, attacks on ALBA and a report on narco-trafficking, it is just a repeat of the Honduran coup playbook." Rafael Isea, Aragua state governor and veteran of Chavez's own 1992 coup attempt, declared the presence of U.S. warplanes and troops on Colombian soil to be, "aimed at the revolutionary process in Venezuela." The Venezuelan communist party announced that it would lead a "citizens march" on July 30 to the Colombian embassy to protest the bases.

¶4. (C) Venezuela's latest review of Colombia comes almost a year to the day after the July 2008 "warming summit" between Chavez and Colombian President Uribe in Punto Fijo (Ref. A). Chavez previously "reviewed" relations with Colombia in November 2007 following his dismissal by Uribe as a mediator between his government and the FARC (Ref. B) and in the run up to the "phony war" with Colombia in March 2008 (Ref. C).

¶5. (C) Comment: Chavez has interpreted several recent events, including the coup in Honduras, critical congressionally mandated reports, and now the FOLs as part of a U.S. conspiracy to reverse the Bolivarian revolution and to ultimately remove him from office. This combined with his ideological sympathy for the FARC and his concern about potential Colombian attacks on FARC camps in Venezuela have put Chavez on red alert. Under the circumstances, his reaction to events could become more dramatic or even reckless. End Comment.

CAULFIELD